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From: Faulkner, Mike
Sent: Mon 8/17/2015 5:18:05 PM
Subject: Gold King Mine Release - Update

Environmental Protection Agency

Emergency Operations Report

Gold King Mine Release into Animas River; San Juan County, CO

Report as of 1830 EDT on 08/16/2015

Overview:

On 8/5, an EPA and Colorado State Division of Reclamation Mining and Safety team was working to investigate and address contamination at the abandoned Gold King Mine in San Juan County, CO. A large release of mine wastewater into Cement Creek occurred during the investigation activities. Initial estimates indicated that the release was approximately one million gallons that was held behind unconsolidated debris near an abandoned mine portal. The estimate has since been revised to 3 million gallons. There were several workers at the site at the time of the breach and all were unharmed. The release's path flows through three of EPA's regions: Region 8—Colorado, Utah and the Southern Ute Tribe; Region 6--New Mexico; and, Region 9--Navajo Nation.

The mine water is being treated in a series of settling ponds constructed near the portal. The treatment appears to be effective. The pH of the water is being raised with the addition of lime and sodium hydroxide solution to facilitate sedimentation of the metals in the ponds and flocculant is being added to increase the amount of sedimentation.

State, Local and other Federal Agency Actions: San Juan County officials are engaged in the response activities. State officials are also on scene. Following the release, the Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment (CDPHE) notified water users downstream so they could take appropriate steps to turn off intakes until the contaminated water passes. The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) measured increased river flows and provisionally calculated flow volume of approximately 3 million gallons discharged from the Gold King Mine. The La Plata County Sheriff opened the Animas River to recreational use on 8/14 with a health advisory from CDPHE. A Colorado State veterinarian has cleared water use for animals.

On 8/14, NMED and the Department of Health lifted the ban on using private water wells. On 8/14, the City of Durango resumed pumping water from the Animas River for further treatment. This decision was made in conjunction with the CDPHE. The City will continue to analyze water quality samples, based on pre-established protocols. The City has also lifted the outdoor irrigation restrictions.

Additional Assisting Departments/Agencies:

Department of the Interior, US Coast Guard, Health and Human Services.

EPA Actions:

Response Organization: EPA is integrated in Unified Command in Durango, CO and in three Incident Command Posts (ICPs) in Silverton and Durango, CO, Farmington, NM with a branch Lake Powell (at the Arizona and Utah Border). Unified EPA Area Command has stood up operations out of Durango, CO with representatives from EPA Regions 6, 8 and 9.

A public-facing website has been set up for the response: <http://www2.epa.gov/goldkingmine>. EPA is reviewing sampling data and developing public messaging to include the development of a wider message that river conditions are returning to normal. This will include the development of Q&A sheets and fact sheets. Beginning 8/16, there will be two Public Information Officers in Silverton, CO.

A pilot test flush of the Animas Consolidate Irrigation Ditch was conducted late in the day on 8/12. The purpose of the test was to visually evaluate sediment transport conditions that would occur upon partially opening the control gate. Ferrous sediments were observed to have been deposited bank to bank in the channel as a result of the mine release. As of 8/15, all irrigation ditches in Region 8 are open and available for use.

Sampling and Data Review: The HQ Environmental Unit (EU) continues to assist with data validation. Daily residential sampling continues. Animas River sediment samples were posted to the incident website on 8/14. No results exceeded recreational screening levels. On 8/15, EPA released additional water quality data from 8/7 to 8/11 on the San Juan River between Farmington and Shiprock, NM.

Water Delivery and Supply: NMED informed EPA that the Town of Morningstar's reserve had dropped drastically and the Town only had an estimated 48 hours of available supply as of 8/14. Morningstar and Farmington are completing the connection between their water systems, current plans are to complete this task the afternoon of 8/16. Although the public water intakes have been opened it will take at least 48 hours for the system to completely come back on line. On 8/15, EPA began transporting and offloading raw water into Morningstar's pretreatment settling ponds.

Navajo Tribal Utility Authority has identified 13 locations for tankage for EPA to distribute water for agriculture and livestock use. EPA continues providing over 16,000 gallons of water per day to each of these locations.

Claims: EPA has a claims process for compensating citizens who suffer personal injury or property damage caused by U.S. government actions. The process includes guidance on documentation that may be required to support claims for loss of employment and loss of income, among other claims. Region 8 has had inquiries about such claims from business owners in CO.

See previous reports for past EPA regional and HQ actions.

Media Interest: High

http://www.denverpost.com/news/ci_28645132/epa-plans-water-treatment-system-gold-king-mine

<http://dailysignal.com/2015/08/14/gold-king-mine-spill-the-epa-is-the-polluter/>

<http://www.cnn.com/2015/08/13/us/colorado-epa-animas-river-spill-owner/index.html>

<http://nmpoliticalreport.com/10024/what-reporters-on-the-ground-are-hearing-about-animas-river-spill/>

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/aug/12/gold-king-mine-spill-democrats-green-activists-scr/>

<http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-0813-reynolds-mining-disaster-20150813-story.html>

The HQ EOC will continue to monitor and provided updates as needed.

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